



Tisch Report

Empowered Eaters:

A Road Map for Stronger
New York City
Nutrition Education
Policies and Programs





**Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Program in Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University**

The Center cultivates research about connections between a just, sustainable food system and healthy eating and translates it into recommendations and resources for educators, policy makers, and community advocates. The Center focuses on schools as critical levers for learning and social change.

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Executive Summary

The Need for a Nutrition Education Policy Road Map

New York City is a leader in food and nutrition policy. The city's Food Standards, Shop Healthy, Health Bucks, and National Salt Reduction Initiatives are just a few of many initiatives that other cities have looked to when developing their own food and nutrition policies. New York City's policies and programs empower New Yorkers—they help citizens buy, grow, prepare, eat, and advocate for healthier foods.

But, the city has room to improve. Twenty-two percent of New Yorkers are obese, low income communities and communities of color are far more likely to suffer from diet-related health conditions, and health care costs continue to rise.^{1,2} Potential cuts to federal and state funds threaten many local initiatives that help New Yorkers eat well. New York must do more to empower eaters—the city must strategically invest in nutrition education and, at the same, maintain funding for existing public health and safety net programs.

Nutrition education has many names—food literacy, obesity prevention, and consumer education, to name a few. Nutrition education involves different strategies and activities that help people navigate the numerous factors influencing what they eat. It provides people with the motivation, skills, and knowledge to balance these factors and still eat well. Nutrition education also maximizes investment in food assistance programs that make healthy food more accessible and affordable. Ultimately, nutrition education empowers people to advocate for food systems that are healthy for themselves, their communities, and the planet.

To strengthen nutrition education, city agency and elected officials, local providers, researchers, and advocates must understand the complex public systems that currently support nutrition education in New York City. This report provides a road map to strengthen the systems that help New Yorkers eat well throughout their lives, in all of the places where they live, work, learn, worship, and play.



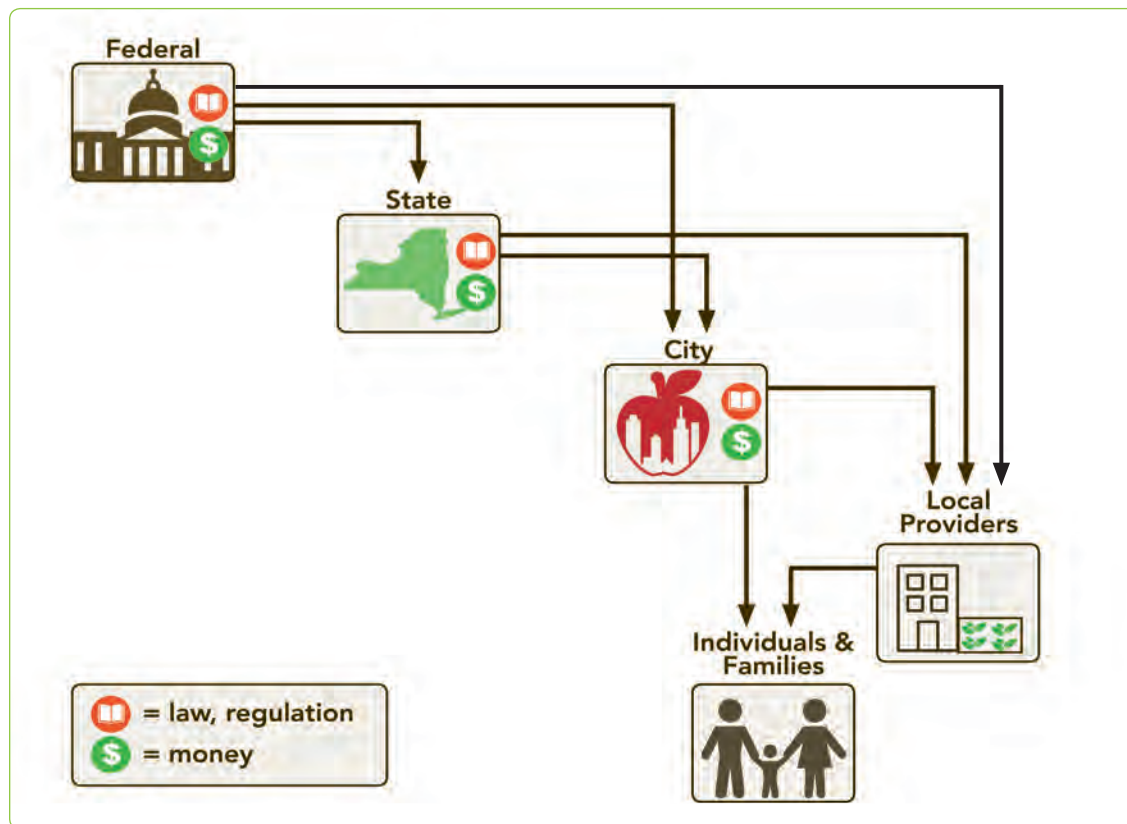
Developing a Nutrition Education Policy Road Map for New York City

This report focuses on the 42 federal, state, and city nutrition education initiatives that New York City agencies administered in federal fiscal year (FY) 2016. To determine the landscape of nutrition education initiatives, we reviewed relevant legal, programmatic, and funding data sources. We also conducted 55 interviews with 80 key city agency officials, local providers, researchers, and advocates.

For this report, we have categorized nutrition education initiatives by the extent to which they focus on and require nutrition education. We outline the legislative, political, and regulatory processes that create, the source(s) that fund, and the agencies that administer these initiatives. We discuss the federal, state, and city health, social service, education, elder, child care, and agricultural policies that authorize nutrition education initiatives.

We also describe supports for and barriers to publicly supported nutrition education in New York City.

Figure ES.1: Current Relationships among Federal Agencies, State Agencies, City Agencies, Local Providers, and Nutrition Education Participants



Key Findings

Federal Nutrition Education Policy

The majority of New York City initiatives that can support nutrition education are authorized by federal legislation and receive federal funding. Familiarity with federal policy and funding processes is necessary to understand how nutrition education initiatives operate at the city level. In FY 2016, the federal government administered approximately 70 initiatives which can support nutrition education; New York City agencies administered approximately 20 of these federal initiatives.

Key Takeaways

- Through legislative and appropriations processes, Congress creates and funds a host of initiatives that can support nutrition education.
- Numerous federal bills influence nutrition education policies.
- The U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) oversee the bulk of initiatives that can support nutrition education.
- No unifying federal nutrition education strategy exists.

State Nutrition Education Policy

As at the federal level, understanding state level nutrition education policies is necessary to understanding city level initiatives. State policies create complex systems to fund, administer, and deliver nutrition education initiatives. State policies do not establish an overarching framework to coordinate all of these systems. In FY 2016, eight state agencies administered 32 initiatives which can support nutrition education. In New York City, the state administered 14 and city agencies administered 13 state-run initiatives.

Key Takeaways

- New York State laws, regulations, and policies support federal initiatives. They also authorize several novel state initiatives.
- New York State relies heavily on federal funding to support nutrition education, making nutrition education initiatives vulnerable to federal budget cuts.
- The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) are the state agencies responsible for the majority of nutrition education initiatives in New York State.

New York City Nutrition Education Policy

City agencies face the unenviable task of coordinating different federal, state, and city policies and funding streams. As at the federal and state levels, the city lacks a unifying strategy for nutrition education. But despite strategic challenges, New York City has the financial capacity and political support to develop, administer, and promote initiatives that help people to eat well. In FY 2016, 11 city agencies oversaw 42 different initiatives that support nutrition education.

Key Takeaways

- Because there are many federal and state policies that affect nutrition education, New York City has passed only a handful of additional policies. These policies—in particular the New York City Food Standards (Food Standards)—influence nutrition education initiatives that receive federal, state, and city funds.
- City agencies, especially the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), rely on federal and state funds to support nutrition education initiatives, making them vulnerable to budget cuts at both levels.
- New York City agencies support a broad array of nutrition education initiatives across the five boroughs, but do not have a unifying strategy to do so.

Interview Themes

Key themes from interviews shed light on supports for and barriers to nutrition education in New York City. Common themes include the motivation, funding, politics, government and community roles, and coordination for nutrition education.

Key Takeaways

- City agencies have varied reasons for administering and supporting nutrition education initiatives.
- Funding and politics create challenges, as well as opportunities, to support nutrition education.
- City officials and local providers grapple with their respective roles in supporting nutrition education.
- City officials and local providers emphasize that collaboration and coordination are necessary, but find these tasks challenging.

Recommendations

Our recommendations focus on increasing access to nutrition education initiatives, specifically how to improve the systems that govern, deliver, and fund nutrition education. Recommendations regarding the quality and impact of publicly supported nutrition education initiatives are beyond the scope of this report. If enacted, these recommendations would expand the scope, reach, and sustainability of nutrition education; enhance local providers' capacity; and align and elevate nutrition education in New York City. Our suggestions are timely, practical, and specific to the current nutrition education landscape in New York City.

Expand the scope, reach, and sustainability of nutrition education initiatives.

- Invest more New York City tax dollars in nutrition education to make initiatives more flexible, comprehensive, and sustainable.
- Support sustained behavioral, policy, systems, and environmental changes with longer-term funding.
- Embed nutrition education into public health and health care reform efforts.
- Authorize or seek adequate funds to evaluate which nutrition education initiatives are effective.
- Advocate to maintain and expand federal and state support for nutrition education.
- Engage elected officials as nutrition education champions.

Enhance local providers' capacity to implement nutrition education initiatives.

- Ensure that a wide range of community organizations have resources to provide nutrition education.
- Give local providers, community members, and other stakeholders a greater role in designing and implementing nutrition education policies.

Improve collaboration and coordination among nutrition education initiatives.

- Promote a common definition for nutrition education within publicly supported initiatives.
- Create mechanisms to coordinate nutrition education within and across agencies and local providers.
- Update the City Food Metrics report to include all agencies' nutrition education-related initiatives.
- Develop consistent food and nutrition goals across city agencies and communities.
- Better coordinate and support nutrition education in schools.

Future Research

Further research would strengthen stakeholders' ability to craft policies and practices that ensure all New Yorkers have access to great nutrition education—that all New Yorkers are empowered eaters. Future research could study how providers implement initiatives; evaluate the impact of publicly supported efforts; explore participant perspectives; compare New York to other cities; identify the strongest policy levers; and analyze the feasibility of campaigns to strengthen nutrition education.